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FIRST FIVE VERSES OF GĀHĀ SATTASAI

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In Prākrita poetry, there has been frequent employment of double *entendre* or *śleṣa* ; and through this device, a limited number of words or lines or even ideas are made to yield a proportionately larger meaning and significance. In fact, providing a scope for fresh discovery is a set objective of makers of Prākrita verses.

2. According to literary tradition, Hāla, a king of Sātavāhana dynasty, compiled in the 2nd Century A. D., a collection of Prākrita verses, "Gāhā Sattasai", with the assistance of some well known Prākrita scholars of his time. Evidence has been found that this Anthology was referred to as a "*Koṣa*", which means either an Anthology or a seed chamber or a treasury. That Gāhā Koṣa would be a more poetic description of a collection of verses than a numerical title like Gāhā Sattasai, may be easily conceded. Based on this point, it was also suggested that this collection acquired its title, "Gāhā Sattasai", much later ; i. e. after a period of enlargement of separate small editions. At first sight, this seems to be a plausible explanation. For what could be more natural than that a Koṣa was expected to be without a predetermined numerical upper limit on its contents ?

The number of verses does not matter, by itself. Their flavour to a Sahridaya is boundless and inexhaustible ; and, as Bāṇabhaṭṭa put it, makes the Anthology, a Treasury that is *Avināśī*. It is not the weight of numbers which matters.

In this context, an examination of the first five verses of this famous Anthology, is not without value. These verses are introductory in character ; and it is not likely that their text was tamperred with or their sequence changed.

3. Verse 1 is invocatory. According to hoary convention, a literary enterprise should begin and end with a prayer to Divinity. The verse is in conformity with this canon. But its significance travels beyond such a formal role. It communicates the important point that even gods have their romantic life. It refers to a morning incident when Śiva, performing his *morning* Sandhyā ritual, has irritated Gouri who got angry on a suspicion that under a pretext of looking at *arghya* water in his *anjali*, Śiva was thinking of somebody else, had peeped over his shoulder, thus allowing the water in Śiva's *anjali* to reflect her angry face and to present a picture of Śiva offering a lotus. This description is full of suggestion. What is noteworthy is that there is corresponding verse 700 which refers to an incident concerning Śiva and Pārvatī when Śiva was performing his *evening* sandhyā. I do not know whether it was intended to convey that these 700 verses were supposed to have been read in between. The interval could easily permit that. But it is clear that these two verses viz. verse 1 and verse 700 were meant to be signposts marking the beginning and the end of this Anthology. The author of neither verse 1 nor verse 700 is claimed by anybody as belonging to a later age. The first verse was composed by Hāla himself, from whose output the Anthology's editorial board also selected a number of other verses—the seventh Śataka being largely derived from it.

4. It is necessary to appreciate that these first five verses go together, in a logical sequence.

In verse 2 there is a pun, the Prākrita word, '*amiyam*' which means either nectar like or possessing undying life or not being limited. While these claims have been put forward for Prākrita poetry, it should not be overlooked that the real background of this verse is the atmosphere of the Vidvat-sabhā which used to be convened by every king in ancient India. Powerful intellects vied with each other, for securing royal patronage and favour, during these debates, which were, ordinarily, held in the presence of the ruler himself. Much was the reward to the successful contestant. The entire Bhoja-Prabandha is based on this point.

Among principal topics discussed were the four Puruṣārthas, or objectives of human life, according to ancient India: Dharma, Artha, Kāma and Mokṣa.

The verse is a dig at those who advocated non-Prākrita literary medium for appreciating one out of these four principal objectives viz. Kāma. The "Tattwa chintā" of Kāma, is clear pointer to such a discussion. It was claimed that if participants in it did not know Prākrita verses, they had no right to discuss that subject at all. Unlike Sanskrit, Prākrita literature was studied by both men and women, in that period. Its principal subject was the romantic element in human life. Its appreciation by a person quoting Prākrita verses was as important to a proper understanding of Kāma as that by a person listening to that quotation. Thus, it was necessary that for obtaining a correct idea of Kāma as a Puruṣārtha, both sides i. e. he who expounds and he who listens, should know Prākrita Poetry.

It was appropriate that verse 2 which stressed the importance of the knowledge of Prākrita poetry, should follow verse 1 which dealt with an invocation to Śiva and Pārvatī.

5. *Verse 3*: This has been interpreted to mean that King Hāla, patron of poets, composed or compiled a collection of 700 verses out of one crore verses. I have come across this translation in all the editions and commentaries on this Anthology, which I could consult.

This traditional appreciation of the verse appears to be palpably wrong. The error proceeds from the fact that the expression, 'Koter-Madhye' was not meant to suggest, "out of one crore verses", as was assumed in these translations and commentories. The correct meaning of this clause was to suggest that King Hāla put 700 gāthās above (or amidst) one crore of coins. The idiomatic use of numerals e.g. the word 'crore' would be clear from the following five instances :—

(i) Jetavana Anāthpediko deta kotisamsthanena keta (Bharhut medallion)

(ii) Tasmin Samaye Anāthepindiko......Jetavanam Kotisamstaranena. (Nidānakatha of Buddhighosa)

(iii) Laksham Kotimalekhayat kile Kalau dāta sa Guptānvayah (Sanjan Copper Plate, EI., 18, 248).

(iv) वित्तस्य विद्या परिसंख्यया मे कोटिश्चस्रोदश चाहरेति ।

(RV. V. 21)

(v) संवाहणसुहरसतोसिराण देन्तेण तुह करे लक्खम् ।

चलणेण विक्कमाइत्तचरिअँ अणुसिक्खिअं तिस्सा ॥

(G S. 464)

In Bhoja-Prabandha, there are many instances of this idiomatic use of a numerical expression e.g. a lakh, to mean that so many coins in that number were indicated.

6. It would be useful to examine these instances further. The first two relate to "Koti-Samstharana", or laying out one crore coins. This involves reference not only to the process of minting coins from a sheet of metal, but also to the practice of spreading coins on the ground to faciliate counting them—their square shape enabling the entire surface being fully covered. The third example clearly shows that even in Sanskrit literature, the expression, 'a crore', not qualified otherwise, generally meant a crore of coins. The fourth one, taken from 'Raghuvaṁśa' should be read along with two more verses from the same Sarga, viz. 29. V and 32. V which establish, beyond any doubt, that Kālidāsa meant to say that more than 14 crores of gold coins had been deposited by Kubera into the court yard of Rughu's Treasury. The fifth, from this very Anthology, contains a pun on the word 'Lakh'.

7. The connexion between a '*koṭi*' and '*koṣa*', derived from a *double entendre* on the word '*koṣa*', was bound to be acceptable to the royal patron of the Prākrita Anthology. As regards a crore in the *koṣa*, there is a relevant passage from 'Śukra-Niti, which deserves a reference in this context :—

लक्षकर्षमितो भागो राजतो यस्य जायते ।
वत्सरे वत्सरे नित्यं प्रजानां त्वपीडनैः ॥ 182
सामंतः स नृपाद्योक्तः यावल्लक्षत्रयावधि ।
तदूर्ध्वं दशलक्षान्तो नृपो मांडलिकः स्मृतः ॥ 183
तद्ध्र्वं तु भवेद्राजा यावद्विंशतिलक्षकः ।
पंचाशल्लक्षपर्यन्तो महाराजः प्रकीतितः ॥ 184
ततस्तु कोटि पर्यन्तः स्वराट् सम्राट् ततः परम् ।
दश कोटि मितो यावद् विराट तु तदनन्तरम् ॥ 185
पंचाशत् कोटि पर्यन्तं सार्वभौमस्ततः परम् ।
सप्तद्वीपाच पृथ्वी यस्य वश्या भवेत्सदा ॥ 186

8. This means that an imperial treasury had an annual receipt of over one crore of coins. There can be no doubt that King Hāla was a great ruler ; and a well known verse from Jyotir-vidābharaṇa counts him

among the six important Vikramādityas. There is ample other evidence to support the surmise that Hāla was a very powerful monarch.

9. The suggestion of verse 3 is now clear, viz. that Hāla put this collection of 700 gāthās above a heap of one crore coins, which was a literary way of stating that he prized them more than that quantity of money.

10. The old interpretation of the verse must be rejected. According to that interpretation, Hāla selected 700 verses out of one crore verses; and if this were correct, it is difficult to assert, simultaneously, that he was affectionately disposed towards poets, since he rejected all but 700 out of one crore verses. Such overwhelming rejection of poetic output would have hardly qualified him to be styled, "Kavi-Vatsala". On the other hand, the correct interpretation, given here, would fully support his title to be called, "Kavi-Vatsala". Seven hundred gāthās were rated more than one crore of coins. "*Madhye*", does not mean, from; and "*Virachitāni*" does not mean, selected.

11. It is this atmosphere of a treasury so prominently associated with a royal court, that is appropriate basis for understanding this important verse, which also contains a pun on the word 'alamkāra'. These 700 verses were well decorated, had jewelry or contained literary graces or poetic figures. A later gāthā in this Anthology, making clever use of *śleṣa* clarifies this point :—

परिमलणसुहा गुरुआ अलद्धविवरा सलक्खणाहरणा ।
थणआ कव्वालाव व्व कस्स हिअए ण लग्गन्ति ॥
(G. S. 428)

12. The Royal Treasury, and the Vidvat-sabhā, convened by the king, thus furnish the background to these two consecutive verses 2 and 3.

King Hāla wanted to imply that his Anthology, dealing with the pursuit of Kāma as a Puruṣārtha, contained that very number of verses, which was put in another work, the Bhagawadgītā, dealing with a different Puruṣārtha, viz. Dharma

13. If this were correct, it would follow that one has to be cautious in accepting a suggestion made by some scholars like Weber that originally, this Anthology did not consist of more than 300 or 400 verses. The main reason cited for assuming that its original compass did not include more than that number of verses, is that among the editions which Weber consulted, only 430 verses were found to be common to all. It is clear, however, that this, by itself, in absence of other supporting evidence, would not be decisive proof that Hāla's Koṣa consisted of only 300 or

400 verses to start with. There is no proof that a deliberate attempt was made, later on, by anybody to add to the original corpus so as to lead to the total of 700 verses. The very fact that a large number of verses was added, in subsequent centuries, should serve as a warning against holding that the original corpus of this Anthology could be identified and that it was formed by the 430 verses which were common to all editions consulted by Weber. The process of interpolation was such that verses having similar meanings, were noted alongside by connoisseurs; and, in course of time, these similar verses were copied as part of the original. Such entries differ in different regions according to the range of reading and study of lovers of this Anthology. The manner in which the additions took place, often pushed out the marginal verses; and several original verses must have got into a stage of flotsam and jetsam, from which it would now be difficult to restore them to their original locations. But the number 700, was a primary, initial and basic objective. Hāla wanted to be a Prākrita Krishna.

14. That this Anthology even originally consisted of 700 verses, is indicated by:—

(1) The two verses containing Isha-stavana, verses 1 and 700, which marked the initial and the final limits of the original collection.

(2) The parallel of the Bhagwadgitā, which contains 700 stanzas, was definitely kept in view.

(3) The improbability of anybody confining the collection to a limited number, much less to 700, *later on*.

(4) It was easier to reach the present day total of nearly 1000 verses from a base of 700 verses than from a base of 250 or 350 verses.

It should not be overlooked that this gāthā 3 is ascribed to Pottisa, who was mentioned by Rājaśekhara in his Karpura Mañjari even before Hāla himself, as an eminent Prākrita poet.

15. Verse 4 has presented a big problem, all along; and many authoritative works on Sanskrit poetics have tried to explain its meaning. While doing so, their authors wandered far away from the intended meaning. The recent conclusion that the verse contained only a simple but charming depiction of a natural and common scene, viz. of a crane

standing on a lotus leaf, does injustice to the compilers of this famous Anthology; and I submit that to dismiss the problem raised by this verse, by observing that it simply comtained a fine example of *Swabhāvokti alaṁkāra*, bypasses the beautiful suggestion which was meant to be conveyed.

The solution is in sight on taking into account the fact that while verse 4 refers to everything being still and motionless, in contrast, verse 5 refers to continuous 'Vibhrama'. While verse 4 contains the word 'Rājate', verse 5 contains the word 'Virājate'. While verse 4 deals with a common natural scene involving a bird and a leaf, verse 5 deals with a profound observation about human behaviour in love. In the non-human world, things in a certain combination would look extrmely pretty, when they are absolutely stationary. But in the human world, where emotion is predominent and there is continual signalling to one another of these emotions, it is not stillness but the presence of those small motions which are source of delight.

While verse 4 is, obviously, a sentence spoken by A to B, perhaps when they were by themselves,—and the chances are that A is man and B is woman—verse 5 is a pronouncement which could be made only by a man. Thus, the two are interlinked; and while they have value independently of each other, yet when they are read consequtively, it gets enhanced. Examples of a couple of verses yielding richer meaning when jointly examined, are not rare in this Anthology. Verse 4 was placed ahead of verse 5 because it involved A telling B, i. e. part of a conversation. It was there, also because its second line refers to valuable articles like a plate of emerald and a Śankha Śukti, articles appropriate for inclusion in the list for a Koṣa. But the author of verse 4 had concealed a few other implications, which, he hoped, would be discovered on a further study of the two lines. A lotus leaf might be near a lotus flower as well. But that flower has not been mentioned. The lotus plant then was, as seen in summer season i. e. when lotus flowers are absent,—a season described by Kālidāsa as, 'Upabhoga-Kṣama'.

The basic metaphor of verse 5 should not be overlooked. This verse is about a Padminī which shakes in the wind of passion, right up to the stage when the flower again folds itself back into the shape of a bud. The verse 4, about a 'bisini--patra', is naturally followed by a verse about a 'Padminī'.